



**FLO**  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
*Advocacy Programs Services*

**GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE**

## What Family Members Can Do During the Hiring Freeze Change Your Perspective and Take Action

*Below is part three of a series of articles by Laura Sheehan, Global Employment Advisor (GEA) for EAP East. Contact your GEA at [GEI@state.gov](mailto:GEI@state.gov).*

Hello fellow EFM's! This is part 3 of the "I'm bound and determined to help you change your perspective on your employment options" series. ☺

Today, I'd like to share with you a personal story. It occurred to me that some of you might be reading these letters and think, "Laura, who are you to give us advice on what to do during the hiring freeze? You've got a job!" And to that very poignant question, I answer: Yes, I do. And let me tell you how I got that job.

Last year at this very time, I interviewed for and was offered a part-time position in the embassy at my current post. In June, we packed out of our last post and by July I was getting my family settled into our new home. I was excited to start work and thought that I could easily transfer my Top Secret security clearances from my last post to this new job. Unfortunately, I had not qualified to register for the Foreign Service Family Reserve Corps (FSFRC) because I ended my job a mere 12 days before the FSFRC launched. I was surprised and dismayed (though maybe I could have predicted) to learn that I had to reinitiate the entire security process in order to gain a Public Trust clearance (even though I had held Top Secret clearances but a few weeks prior). I was looking at months of waiting...again.

While I waited, I started talking to people. One day, I hosted a very casual lunch for a few new friends and their kids so that I could help my own kids make a few connections before school started. During the course of regular conversation, I started to ask about life in our new post and whether many spouses were working...and where. I was listening to everyone else's stories and then one of the women turned and asked me: "Laura, what do you want to do?" (Emphasis on both the "you" and the "want") What do I want to do?! I was temporarily stunned.

I had not actually thought about what I had wanted to do in quite some time. For years, I had been feeling trapped and angry, frustrated and annoyed, always thinking about what my legal career *could have been* if only I had stayed in one place. Somehow, in that moment, I found the words to answer that great question with: "You know, it's funny, but if I could choose anything, I would do something to help people with their resumes. Weird, right? I LOVE writing resumes." And you know what then happened? After they all laughed at me and confirmed that yes, I was weird for loving resumes, one of the women said: "I have got just the job for you!" She proceeded to tell me all about the GEI program (which I had shockingly never heard of before) and that the FLO was currently seeking a qualified candidate to assume the regional position based out of Bangkok. WHAT?!

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[GEI@state.gov](mailto:GEI@state.gov)  
[www.state.gov/flo/employment](http://www.state.gov/flo/employment)

Guess what I did that afternoon? I tracked down the email address for the GEI program, sent in a resume and cover letter requesting to be considered for the position...even though I was based out of Hanoi. Did the FLO team jump for joy when they saw my application? No. My first response was something like: "Thank you for your inquiry. The position is currently vacant. Please note that due to the large number of EFMs in [another country in your region], our ideal candidate will be someone based out of [that city]." Did THAT stop me?! NO! I immediately wrote back and addressed the concern of location by underscoring my close physical proximity to [that city]. A week later, I had an interview.<sup>1</sup>

Does this type of thing happen every day? Maybe it does! Can it happen to you? YES!

How? **Be honest with yourself** about what you really want to do at this time in your life. When you were a kid, I cannot believe that you dreamt of being an EFM who only took the jobs available at that moment in the embassy. Both the lack of bilateral work agreements and the hiring freeze are incredibly frustrating, but neither are factors that should keep us from doing what we want to do. It is time to **stop being negative** and/or thinking about all of the could have's or should have's. **Take a chance and try something new! Network, explore the possibilities...and then POUNCE on the opportunities that arise.**

"But Laura, I don't really know what I want to do! I don't think I know which step to take first! How do I know that the step I take will be the right one?!" In response, I offer the wise words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: **"Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment."**

Go out and give it a try! Will it be perfect? No. Can I (or anyone else) pave that path for you? No. Will it be easy? For you, I certainly hope so...but my personal experience is that the most rewarding paths are the ones that involve some degree of challenge and risk. **Today, I challenge you to change your perspective and to start ACTING on at least one of the many possibilities that are within your reach.**

1. **Try something new!** If you haven't yet figured out which direction you want to go, think of "finding your passion" as a truly messy process full of testing and trying different things.<sup>2</sup> Consider volunteering!<sup>3</sup> Though you might not get paid, you can still use the experience to develop or hone new skills. Doing something is always better than doing nothing....and in trying something new, I am certain you will gain further clarity into how you can best apply your talents and interests in this endless world of job possibilities.
2. **Invest in your professional development.** Maybe you have realized that you really want to pursue a profession that requires a degree or certification that you don't yet have. Consider applying for a Professional Development Fellowship (PDF) to help defray the cost of these courses or certifications! You could be awarded \$1,000-\$2,500 to help fund up to 75% of your professional education activities! (The due date for applications is May 1, so reach out NOW if you have questions!)

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<sup>1</sup> I fully acknowledge both that there were many behind the scenes activities taking place to which I was not privy and that my actions alone did not drive the FLO's decisions...but I know I would not have gotten this job if I had just thrown in the towel when I received that first rather unenthusiastic reply.

<sup>2</sup> This concept is not my own. I read it somewhere and it stuck in my head...but I can't recall or locate the source!

<sup>3</sup> Before you leap into a new volunteering adventure, make sure volunteering is legal in your country...for those of you in Thailand, for example, there are very strict regulations on volunteering. In any post, be sure to submit an Outside Activities request to your Management Office to make sure there are no hidden conflicts of interest.

3. **Network!** Don't think of this as going out to meet strangers with the nebulous hope that someone somewhere might have a connection that you could leverage. NO! Look within your extended network and start gathering information on not just anyone, but the specific people who are in your target industry or who hold positions like the one you envision as your dream job! If you aren't already a member, join LinkedIn and start viewing the profiles of people who have the types of jobs you'd like to land. Then move to step 4.
4. **Conduct informational interviews.** People love to talk about themselves. Use this to your advantage! Reach out to the people in your network that you have identified as those in your target industry or job. Tell them about your professional goals, relate it to their experiences and ask them specifically: "What did you do to get where you are now?" Follow this question with another great one: "Is there anyone else I should talk to?"
5. **Contact your GEA!** There IS a GEA near you. We are all over the world and we are all honored to help in any way that we can. Don't know who your GEA is? Ask your CLO or email **GEI@state.gov** to get the name and email address of your FREE career coach.

**Three final thoughts to inspire you get up and take action:**

1. ***[Your] future depends on what you do today*** - Mahatma Ghandi. If you are unhappy with the way things are, you have a choice to act. You have the opportunity to find something new and fulfilling for yourself. And what if you choose not to act? Well, if you don't get up and get going, you will remain exactly where you are.
2. One step at a time. Don't get overwhelmed. Today, commit to taking one step toward your next professional goal. Take just that first step. If you take but just one step a day, think of where you can be in a month...in a year. WOW!
3. ***Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right.***- Henry Ford